Whispering Pines

YMCA HAYO-WENT-HA CAMPS
Two Camps. One Purpose.

JUNE 2026

In This Issue:

Heart of Our Vision: 2026 Summer Staff Team
A New Home for Sparks Day Camp
Progress at Arbutus Lake
Planning for the Future
WILDER Training: Shaping Confident Leaders
Leave No Child Inside: Helping Every Child Get to Camp
Something BIG is Coming to Hayo-Went-Ha Camps
Thurston Creek Bridge and Camp Road Restoration Project Complete
Spruced Up and Ready for Summer!
It Takes a Camp Community
HWH Camps Homecoming Returns!
HWH Camps Gear Drive!
Calling All Alumni!
The First Trip Letter of Summer
Welcome to Something Bigger Than Yourself
Building Camp, Building Community

Heart of Our Vision: 2026 Summer Staff Team

By John (JC) Carlson, CEO

Our Vision - We will be the nation's premier wilderness-based overnight camp, unlocking transformative pathways to growth and shaping the leaders of tomorrow.

As we count down the final days until campers arrive, an unmistakable energy fills YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps. Cabins are being prepared, program areas are coming to life, and an exceptional team of staff is coming together for another unforgettable summer. Each year, our staff are the

driving force behind the camp experience, and the 2026 team stands out as one of our strongest and most mission-driven.

This summer, 50% of our staff are returning, bringing deep commitment to our mission, proven leadership, and a passion for mentoring the next generation. Many began here as campers themselves and now return as leaders who carry forward the traditions, values, and sense of belonging that define Hayo-Went-Ha Camps. Alongside them, new staff arrive with fresh perspective, creativity, and energy that has already strengthened our culture of learning and growth.

We are also proud to welcome staff from around the world. Their presence enriches our community through diverse experiences and perspectives, broadening horizons and building friendships that extend far beyond the summer. These connections are part of what makes camp such a powerful place for growth and understanding.

Throughout two weeks of staff training, more than 150 staff members from both camps engaged in workshops, team-building, leadership development, and wilderness training. Their commitment has been extraordinary. In every setting, whether building technical skills, preparing for camper safety, or forming new relationships, they have shown what it means to lead with care, responsibility, and purpose.

Looking across both camps, I am filled with optimism and gratitude. The strength of this team is not only in their experience or enthusiasm, but in their shared belief that camp can positively impact lives. The future of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps is bright because of the remarkable people who choose to spend their summer investing in others, building community, and shaping experiences that matter deeply in the lives of young people.

We can’t wait for campers to arrive on June 14 and experience the impact this extraordinary team of role models will have from the very first moment.



A New Home for Sparks Day Camp

At Torch Lake, we are thrilled to announce that Sparks Day Camp has a new home in one of the most beautiful locations on camp: a space affectionately known as "The Meadow."

By Liz Clark, Registrar & Sparks Day Camp Director

I'm excited to serve as the new Director of Sparks Day Camp. As I enter my tenth summer at Hayo-Went-Ha Camps, I am honored to help lead this next chapter and bring a renewed vision for Sparks that will create even greater opportunities for campers and families.

The Meadow provides an exceptional day camp setting perfect for exploration, creativity, and adventure. Overlooking the beauty of Torch Lake, this new home offers children endless opportunities to play, discover, and connect with nature in ways that truly embody the spirit of camp. Also, for the first time, Sparks campers will enjoy their own dedicated waterfront and beach area. We are also giving new life to the caboose that has sat unused for years, transforming it into the **Nature Express**—a hub for nature education, arts and crafts, and hands-on discovery.

Additional enhancements include relocating the camp greenhouse to the Day Camp area, creating opportunities for campers to learn about gardening, sustainability, and environmental stewardship. Thanks to the generosity of our community partners, The Meadow will also feature a new Gaga Pit, archery and slingshot ranges, a storage shed, and several other improvements designed to enrich the Day Camp experience.

We are especially grateful to Richter Construction Inc. (RCI) for its partnership in helping bring this vision to life, as well as GFL Environmental for its support of camperships and Great Lakes Energy for grant funding that made the new storage shed possible.
These enhancements represent far more than new amenities. They reflect our commitment to creating meaningful outdoor experiences, fostering curiosity and confidence, and ensuring that every child has the opportunity to grow, explore, and thrive. Most importantly, they demonstrate what is possible when a community comes together to invest in the next generation.



Progress at Arbutus Lake

At YMCA Camp Arbutus Hayo-Went-Ha, exciting developments continue to move us closer to our vision.

By Amanda Macaluso, Director of Development and Alumni Experience

Thanks to the generosity of the Coughlin Foundation, Phase One of our new Wilderness Adventure Center has been completed. This first phase included the construction of a new commissary that will serve as the operational hub for our expedition programs.

The facility will support food storage and preparation, logistics coordination, and trip planning for the more than 40 wilderness expeditions that will launch from Arbutus Lake this summer. More importantly, it represents an intentional investment in the quality and safety of our outdoor leadership programs and our commitment to delivering exceptional expedition experiences.



WILDER Training: Shaping Confident Leaders

Preparing counselors to lead a safe and adventurous summer

By Gina Georgiou, Director of Wilderness Experience & Group Retreats

One of the most exciting developments this spring has been the continued growth and success of our WILDER (**W**ilderness **I**nitiative for **L**eadership **D**evelopment & **E**xpedition **R**eadiness) training program. The investment in staff training and preparation is already making a tremendous difference as we prepare for another summer of adventure.

As we conclude staff training this week, more than 100 staff members from both camp locations participated in WILDER training. This program serves as an important complement to the expertise of our Wilderness First Responder (WFR) and Wilderness First Aid (WFA) certified staff, helping to expand wilderness preparedness across our entire team.
The energy and enthusiasm surrounding this year's WILDER program could be felt throughout camp. The staff immersed themselves in a hands-on training experience that strengthened skills, built confidence, and reinforced our commitment to safety and excellence in the outdoors. As a result, our team is better prepared than ever to lead transformative wilderness adventures that challenge, inspire, and create lasting memories for campers throughout the summer.

A special thank you goes to our Wilderness Trip Team. Emma Macaluso and Tristan Dougans did an outstanding job leading the effort, with tremendous support from the Division Leaders and many others across camp. The success of WILDER was truly a team accomplishment. Training began on Thursday with camp-based rotations focused on equipment distribution, trip preparation, and essential wilderness skills. On Friday, staff gathered at both camps for hands-on instruction led by experienced group leaders. The focus was on practical skills that staff will use throughout the summer while leading campers in the field.

Saturday marked the start of the adventure. Ten groups departed for different sections of the Manistee River for a two-night wilderness experience. Along the route, two Trip Coordinators were stationed at a midpoint training location where staff received additional instruction on Garmin navigation devices, Coleman stove systems, and Aquamira water purification techniques. Throughout the trip, participants also worked through a comprehensive skills checklist and practiced the risk management principles that are such an important part of wilderness travel.

On Sunday, staff leaders visited the midpoint and had the opportunity to observe seven of the ten groups as they passed through. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Staff members reported gaining confidence, developing new skills, and strengthening their ability to work together as a team. The enthusiasm was contagious, and the conversations were filled with stories of learning, problem-solving, and adventure.

The WILDER program continues to build stronger leaders, safer trip experiences, and more confident staff members. As campers arrive this summer, they will be guided by a team that has spent countless hours preparing to create meaningful, safe, and memorable wilderness experiences.





Leave No Child Inside: Helping Every Child Get to Camp

Richard Louv's book *No Child Left Inside* sparked a nationwide movement encouraging children to spend more time outdoors and reconnect with nature.

By Amanda Macaluso, Director of Development and Alumni Experience

At YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps, we see that transformation happen every summer as young people unplug, explore the natural world, build confidence, and discover what they are capable of. We believe every child deserves that opportunity, regardless of their family's financial circumstances.

For the summer of 2026, 150 campers have applied for campership assistance, representing more than $350,000 in requested support. Camperships help ensure that every child can experience the confidence, friendships, adventure, and sense of belonging that camp provides.

One of the things that makes Hayo-Went-Ha Camps so special is the diversity of experiences and backgrounds represented around every campfire, dining hall table, and trail. Campers come from nearly 40 states, and together they learn empathy, build lasting friendships, and discover that what unites us is greater than what divides us.

This year, the need is greater than ever. We have already committed more campership support than we expect to raise, yet families continue to reach out seeking assistance.

Summer camp begins in just one week, and while we have made tremendous progress, we have not yet reached the finish line. Please consider making a gift to the Summer Dreams Campership and Equipment Drive today. Your support will help ensure that no child is left inside and no child is left behind because of cost.

Please Make Your Gift Today!


AERO
HUGS
WE CARE
USA
ARNOLD TRANSIT CO.

Something BIG is Coming to Hayo-Went-Ha Camps

Join Us Friday, July 17 at Shorts Brewing

For over a century, Hayo-Went-Ha Camps have shaped lives, built leaders, and created friendships that last forever.

On Friday, July 17th, at Shorts in Elk Rapids, we take a major step into the future. It will be a historic announcement. The event runs from 3 pm to 6pm, with the big announcement at 5 pm.

Join alumni, families, and friends of camp for a night that will become part of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps' history — including a landmark announcement that will positively impact generations of campers, preserving our legacy and protecting our future.

This isn't just another camp gathering.

This is one of those moments people will talk about for years and say…

"I was there."
Big announcement
Camp stories & connections
Alumni, friends & camp family together again
A celebration of the past — and what comes next
Be there when the next chapter begins!

YMCA HAYO-WENT-HA

CAMPS CONNECT

For over a century, Hayo-Went-Ha Camps have shaped lives, built leaders, and created friendships that last forever.

Join alumni, families, and friends of camp for a night that will become part of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps history — including a landmark announcement that will positively impact generations of campers, preserving our legacy and protecting our future.



JULY 17TH, 2026

3:00–6:00PM

Shorts Pull Barn
211 Industrial Park Drive, Elk Rapids, MI

Be There When the Next Chapter Begins

(231) 544-5915 / www.hayowentha.org
@hayowenthacamps

Thurston Creek Bridge and Camp Road Restoration Project Complete

The severe storms and record rainfall that impacted Northern Michigan throughout April left their mark across the region. Flooded roads, damaged culverts, shoreline erosion, and washouts affected communities throughout Antrim County and beyond.

YMCA Camp Torch Hayo-Went-Ha on Torch Lake was no exception.

The storms caused significant damage to the historic Thurston Creek Bridge and washed out a portion of the gravel road leading to the Old Dining Hall. For more than 120 years, this well-traveled roadway has connected generations of campers, staff, alumni, and families to the heart of camp. It was the original entrance to the camp many years ago.

Recognizing the importance of preserving both camp operations and the long-term integrity of the property, camp undertook a comprehensive restoration project.

Under the leadership of Maintenance Director Scott Swanston, repairs moved forward quickly and efficiently. Scott worked diligently to coordinate the project, secure the necessary approvals, and ensure that access to this important area of camp was restored as soon as possible.

As the project progressed, it became clear that simply rebuilding the road in its original location would leave it vulnerable to future erosion and storm damage. Instead, camp invested in a more sustainable solution by relocating approximately 35 feet of roadway away from Thurston Creek.

In addition to the bridge and roadway improvements, plans are underway to restore the historic entrance stonework that has welcomed campers and visitors to this area of camp for generations, preserving another important piece of Torch Hayo-Went-Ha's history.






Spruced Up and Ready for Summer!

The Torch Spring Spruce Up was a major success!

We went into this weekend with a clear goal: make camp ready for the Gaylord Intermediate School students who would be arriving at camp for the first time in 7 years the following Monday. This meant cleaning all of the lodging in the Bonbright Basement and Kresge Basement along with cleaning the Boulevard and Roundabout Bathhouses. I am pleased to say we accomplished so much more!

With over 30 volunteers who joined us, we were able to get all of the camp leaf-blown, our Team Building and Low Initiatives raked out and sanded, new tables set up for Day Camp, and the famously large event tent was put up on the A-Field! We are so thankful for a community that cares about keeping our camp so well maintained along with making sure that these experiences can be passed onto others.

On Sunday, we finished our breakfast off with the Sunday Tradition of singing The Trilogy (Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream, America the Beautiful, and This Land is Your Land) in the dining hall with Jim Austin leading us. Sitting in the dining hall with a crowd of multiple generations of Hayo-Went-Ha Camps alumni singing the Trilogy is something that I will not soon forget.

Thank you, everyone!



It Takes a Camp Community

The Arbutus spring spruce up was a big hit this year!

I am absolutely blown away by the work our incredible group of volunteers did while they were here this past month. A little over 40 people showed up and showed out, which along with some amazing weather means that every single one of our projects was completed!

Reconnecting with alumni, campers and current staff made the weekend not only successful but so much fun, and I am so so grateful to the community that we have here at our amazing camps.

Dink and I have been remarking for the past week during staff training just how much we've gotten done this year, the really great weekend that we had here at Arbutus set us up really wonderfully coming into staff training and we're at a point where we've able to knock out not just the projects that we need to make Camp run, but also the projects that helps Camp look it's fast when we're running! All of that to say we couldn't have done it without our incredible volunteers! Here's to another amazing summer on the shores of Arbutus Lake.

Thank you, everyone.



HWH Camps Homecoming Returns!

We’re bringing a favorite tradition back to the shores of Torch and Arbutus Lakes — Homecoming, Hayo-Went-Ha Camps style!

Whether you are an alumnus, a current camp parent, a former staff member, or simply someone who loves camp, we invite you to join us for our second annual HWH Camps Homecoming.

Homecoming is all about reconnecting with old friends, meeting new members of the camp community, and celebrating the experiences, traditions, and friendships that make Hayo-Went-Ha Camps so special. Scheduled to coincide with camper drop-off days, it provides the perfect opportunity for parents, alumni, and friends of camp to gather and share in the excitement of a new camp session beginning.

Save the Dates

Sunday, June 14
Sunday, July 12
Location: Short's Pull Barn, Elk Rapids, Michigan

Time: Beginning at 3:00 p.m. and continuing throughout the afternoon and evening.

Enjoy camp stories, games, friendly competitions, refreshments, and updates on exciting things happening at HWH Camps. It is a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with the camp community, hear what is new, and celebrate another summer of adventure, friendship, and growth.

No RSVP is required. Simply stop by, bring a friend, and join the fun.



HWH Camps Gear Drive!

Inspired by the friendships, adventures, and opportunities she has found at camp, longtime camper Anna Wojcik is launching "Anna's Pack It Forward Camp Gear Drive" to help future campers begin their own Hayo-Went-Ha Camps journey.

Hi, my name is Anna Wojcik, and I have been coming to camp every summer (except summer 2020- COVID) since I was 9 years old. My first year was 2019. Camp has always been a place that is special to me. It is exciting to have a place where I can meet new people and feel like I've known them for years, after only spending 4 weeks with them. One of my favorite trips was the Killarney trip in Canada. Specifically, when you paddle in, you start on a river, and once it opens up, you can see this huge lake with mountains in the background. I remember I turned around to my friend, Sadie, and I had said: "I can't believe this is how I get to spend my summers". This memory sticks in my head because of how excited I was about the next two weeks with all my closest friends. It makes me even more excited to be able to spend more time with them in Alaska. We have always talked about the Alaska trip since we were nine, and now we finally get to go at the age of sixteen.

Camp is very important to me. At the end of every session, I can't wait until next summer to see my friends.

As I get ready to enter my junior year of high School, I am thinking about a project for my school's National Honor Society. As part of the NHS application, I will need to demonstrate excellence in Scholarship, Leadership, Service, and Character. Part of my application involves a project that demonstrates I meet all four of these characteristics. I wanted my project to be about camp since it has been such a big part of my life. One issue that I know some campers might encounter is needing camping supplies and equipment, so I came up with the idea of a summer gear drive for camp, where people could donate any old clothing or gear they may have.

Any donations would be appreciated. Camp is especially looking for hiking boots with ankle support, water shoes, rain gear, sleeping mats, dry-fit t-shirts, and fleece. All in good condition, please.

Drop off dates

Sunday, June 14	Sunday, June 28
Sunday, July 12	Sunday, July 26

Location: Please drop these at the check in table at each camp.

Gear Up Kindness

YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps Gear Drive.

Help our campers thrive this summer by donating essential equipment. Items we are looking for are hiking boots with ankle support, water shoes with ankle support, rain jackets, rain pants, dry-fit shirts, and cozy fleece sweaters.



Drop-Off Dates at Both Camps

Sunday, June 14	Sunday, June 28	Sunday, July 12	Sunday, July 26







Calling All Alumni!

Looking for a way to show your Hayo-Went-Ha Camps spirit?

The Alumni Store is now open and stocked with camp gear for every generation of alumni, from classic hoodies and T-shirts to even an alumni trip shirt. Just in case you no longer fit into your Pathfinder trip shirt from when you were in the 5th grade!

The only way to shop is to register for the Each for All Alumni Platform.

Shop. Connect. Stay involved. Stay loyal!

alumni.hayowentha.org

Each for All, All for Each!

TORCH	
TRIP	COLOR
Adventurer	Royal Purple
Trailblazer	Light Blue
Pathfinder	Yellow/Gold
Pioneers	Black
Voyageur	Orange
Bushwhacker	Orange
Trekker	Irish Green
Vikings	Navy
Sailor	Royal Blue
Islanders	Berry
Kayaker	Grey
Isle Royale	Red
Navs	Ash Grey
Killarney	Forest Green
Alaska	Maroon

ARBUTUS	
TRIP	COLOR
Adventurer	White
Trailblazer	Light Blue
Pathfinder	Yellow/Gold
Pioneers	Yellow/Gold
Voyageur	Periwinkle
Bushwhacker	Orange
Trekker	Royal Purple
Biker	Green
Vikings	Navy
Kayaker	Grey
Islanders	Pale Yellow
Killarney	Forest Green
Alaska	Maroon

Register Now to Get Your Gear!



The First Trip Letter of Summer:

A letter from the Arbutus Hayo-Went-Ha Senior Staff

Dear YMCA Camp Arbutus Hayo-Went-Ha Camper,

Consider this your very first trip letter of the summer. If you are new to camp, we will share with you what a trip letter is when you arrive!

For our returning campers, maybe the group chats are waking back up. Maybe the countdown on your calendar has officially started, or there's already a printed packing list sitting somewhere in your room. Maybe you're wondering who your counselors will be this year, or imagining what it'll feel like to paddle the Ausable river for the first time, only to one day portage those same Old Town canoes through Killarney.

And to our first-year campers:

Maybe you're nervous. Maybe you're excited. Maybe you have absolutely no idea what to expect this summer.

That's okay!

Here at camp, we're in the middle of Ad Staff training, and soon our counseling and program staff will arrive, ready to help create another unforgettable summer. Recently, our Ad Staff was given 15 minutes to talk about what we wanted to tell our 2026 campers (that's you)!

Twenty joyful, passionate minutes later, we realized that 15 minutes was never going to be enough time to explain why this place is so special. And neither is one letter. (There may or may not have been a group hug involved.)

So to all of our campers this summer, whether it's your first year, your fifth, or your tenth, here's what we want you to know:

We cannot wait to sing in the dining hall with you and jump into the lake with all our clothes on. We cannot wait to watch friendships form that will last a lifetime, and memories take shape that you'll carry forever. Whether you're paddling down the Boardman River or mountaineering in Alaska this summer, we are so excited to watch each of you grow, laugh, dance, and learn to call these piney wood hills your second home.

We've missed you all, and are so excited to welcome old and new friends alike so soon.

To Arbutus moon and back,
Your 2026 Ad Staff



Welcome to Something Bigger Than Yourself: A letter from the Torch Hayo-Went-Ha Senior Staff

Dear YMCA Camp Torch Hayo-Went-Ha Camper,

The ad staff team would like to share a little of what you can expect to get out of camp. As you walk through the doors of the historic Bonbright Lodge, whether stepping into a new experience or returning to your home away from home, you will be part of something unique. You will be part of a community that learns how to live and have fun together. A community that welcomes you for who you are and helps you become who you want to be. A community that lifts each other up through challenges, because although camp will be an amazing, fun experience, it will not all be easy. You will go on a trip where you canoe for the first time, push yourself a little further on the climbing wall than you have in the past, and make new friends. At the same time, it might sound scary or be overwhelming in the moment. Camp will be there to support you through the tough bits and celebrate the growth you achieve because of it. Making new friends and going to a new place is intimidating, but when you are vulnerable and put yourself out there, you experience all the wonderful opportunities and people Camp has to offer. These new challenging experiences are where you will grow, and this growth will give you a leg up in the rest of your life, creating memories you will talk about with your camp friends forever.

You will learn things while you are at camp. The learning does not happen exactly in the way you learn at school. It happens through your experience at camp rather than being dictated by a teacher. It will happen through the feedback you get from your counselors and the conversations you have with friends. Some of the things we have improved in our lives in ways we never could have known at the time. I remember my first day at college, and much like camp, it's a little scary. You do not know anyone, yet you are all there to do relatively the same thing. Sitting in the quad of my dorm, eating lunch alone, I remembered my first time at camp and that I could just go up to someone and introduce myself. That ability to make myself vulnerable and make new friends is something I practiced at camp, and you all will too. The things you will learn can include hard skills as well. The first time I lit a backpacking stove was at camp, and now backpacking is one of my main hobbies. Similarly, when I was a bushwacker, I had never done my own laundry before. My cabin went to the laundromat, and a cabin mate of mine showed me where to put the soap and how to start the machine. I signed up for ultimate frisbee instruction and learned how to throw a frisbee forehand and backhand. All these small moments of learning happen in a

space where you are allowed to make mistakes and learn from them because of the community that is created at camp. You will soon learn that the fun you have and the growth you achieve while at camp are the same and exactly what makes our camp special.

Thank you for joining us at YMCA Camp Torch Hayo-Went-Ha. We cannot wait to welcome you into this community that will stick with you for the rest of your life. It is your joy, passion, and determination that make camp the magical place that keeps people coming back year after year, and we are so excited to make summer 2026 exceptional with you.



Building Camp, Building Community: Thank You, Richter Construction, Inc.

RICHTER CONSTRUCTION, INC. or RCI is a local construction company that continually goes above and beyond for the children and families we serve here at YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps.

RCI is a local construction company that continually goes above and beyond for the children and families we serve here at YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps. Over the years, their expertise has been instrumental in completing many of our largest construction projects, including two health centers, three bathhouses, a Wilderness Center, and countless other improvements and repairs throughout camp.

This year, YMCA Camp Torch Hayo-Went-Ha made the exciting decision to relocate our Day Camp program to a dedicated area of camp where campers will have their own space, direct access to Torch Lake, and plenty of room to explore, play, and grow.

As we prepared for the move, we quickly realized we needed several key pieces of infrastructure, including a gaga pit, an archery range, and a structure to support restroom facilities.

With camp just around the corner, RCI stepped in without hesitation. At the final hour, they sent a crew for two full days to complete these important projects. The team of three was joined by RCI President Chris Richter, whose hands-on involvement demonstrated the company's commitment to our mission and community.

Their support was invaluable. Thanks to their hard work and willingness to help, we are ready to welcome our first Day Camp campers of the summer.

We want to publicly thank RCI for their support, which is genuine, deeply appreciated, and makes a lasting impact on the experience our campers have each summer. They willingly gave their time,

expertise, and energy to help create safe, engaging spaces where children can learn, grow, and thrive.

Thank you, RCI, for helping us prepare camp for another incredible summer. Your partnership helps make camp possible for the hundreds of Day Camp and Resident Camp campers who will call Hayo-Went-Ha Camps home this season.

Stay in the Loop!

Check out the new events section on the website.

Your one-stop place to check all the camp events for the year!

Events Calendar

Camp Connections

Do you know a camp friend who isn't receiving the Whispering Pines newsletter? Have them reach out to Amanda at **amacaluso@hayowentha.org** so they don't miss any updates.

Click here for all past editions of the Whispering Pines and some news from alumni. Weddings, Babies, and reunions…

the YMCA **YMCA HAYO-WENT-HA CAMPS**
Two Camps. One Purpose.

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